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Message Text

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INFO OCT-01 ARA-14 ISO-00 OES-07 AID-05 OIC-02 EPAE-00
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FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY PANAMA

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS:SENV, PN, US

SUBJECT:CONFERENCE ON DEFORESTATION OF TROPICAL FORESTS AND CANAL WATERSHED PROBLEMS

REFERENCE: PANAMA 3565, STATE 133546

1. THE CONFERENCE HELD JUNE 12-14 DEALT BROADLY WITH PROBLEMS, INSTITUTIONS, AND ISSUES RELATED TO DEFORESTATION OF THE WORLD'S TROPICAL REGIONS AND WAS ATTENDED BY A WIDE RANGE OF EXPERTS AND REPRESENTATIVES OF GOVERNMENTAL AND PRIVATE ORGANIZATIONS. ISSUES RELATED TO PANAMA FORESTS CAME UP SEVERAL TIMES DURING THE CONFERENCE DELIBERATIONS.

2. AT THE FIRST SESSION, DR. FRANK WADSWORTH OF THE US FOREST SERVICE INSTITUTE OF TROPICAL FORESTRY PRESENTED A
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PAPER ON DEFORESTATION IN THE CANAL WATERSHED (COPY BEING POUCHED TAYLOR). THE PAPER HIGHLIGHTED GRAPHICALLY THE IMPORTANCE OF THE WATERSHED'S FORESTS TO PANAMA AND THE OPERATION OF THE CANAL AS WELL AS THE DANGERS TO AND NEED TO PRESERVE THESE FORESTS. MISMANAGEMENT OF THIS TASK, HE SAID, COULD RESULT IN THE US TRANSFERRING "A WORTHLESS DITCH" TO PANAMA.

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3. IN A SUBSEQUENT MAIN ADDRESS, FORMER AMBASSADOR ROBERT BLAKE OF THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR ENVIRONMENT AND

DEVELOPMENT REFERRED TO THE CANAL DEFORESTATION PROBLEMS AND THE AID WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PROJECT AS ONE ILLUSTRATION OF HIS MORE GENERAL POINTS ON THE URGENCY OF TAKING PROMPT ACTION TO CHECK TROPICAL DEFORESTATION.

4. AT A WORKSHOP ON THE SECOND DAY (MODERATED BY DR. IRA RUBINOFF OF STRI) DISCUSSION TOUCHED SEVERAL TIMES ON THE NEED TO SET ASIDE FOREST RESERVES IN THE CANAL WATERSHED, ON THE ECONOMIC COSTS OF SILTATION CAUSED BY DEFORESTATION, AND ON THE INADEQUACY OF PROTECTIVE FORCES. AID REPRESENTATIVES DESCRIBED THE WATERSHED PROJECT'S GOALS.

5. A RECOMMENDATION FROM THE CONFERENCE TO STATE AND AID WAS ADOPTED URGING MEASURES TO PRESERVE WATERSHEDS AND THEIR RESOURCES. IT ORIGINALLY FOCUSED ON THE PANAMA CANAL WATERSHED, BUT WAS LATER BROADENED TO COVER ALL WATERSHEDS, AND ELIMINATED SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO THE PANAMA CANAL AREA.

6. COMMENT: THE US ENVIRONMENTAL AND SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY CONCERNED WITH TROPICAL FORESTS IS NOW WELL AWARE OF THE CANAL WATERSHED PROBLEM. THEY ARE NOT CRITICAL OF THE USG AT THIS STAGE, BUT ARE CONCERNED. THE PIONEERING NATURE OF UNCLASSIFIED

THE AID WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PROJECT IN THIS FIELD BECAME MORE APPARENT THAN IT HAS BEEN PREVIOUSLY, AND IT WILL BE FOLLOWED WITH PROFESSIONAL INTEREST BY THESE SPECIALISTS.

7. PLEASE PASS USAID AND PANCANAL COMPANY.

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